DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 808 FL 020 784

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TITLE Teaching the Writing Process through Full Dyadic Writing.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (26th, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, March 3-7, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Research; Classroom Techniques; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Cooperative Learning; *English (Second Language); Freshman Composition; *Group Dynamics; Higher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Interpersonal Communication; Language Research; Scores; Second Language Instruction; Student Projects; Teaching Methods; Videotape Recordings; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Dyads; *Process Approach (Writing)

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effectiveness of full dyadic writing as a technique for teaching writing to students of English as a Second Language (ESL). Subjects were 31 college students of diverse cultural backgrounds enrolled in ESL sections of freshman English. Each chose a partner with a different native language with whom to write two essays, the first and fifth of the course. For the first, three pairs volunteered to have the entire writing process videotaped for closer observation. Scores on the first dyadic essay were compared with the second essay of the course, written individually, and scores on the second dyadic essay were compared with individual scores of the fourth essay of the course. Students also recorded reactions to collaborative writing after each dyadic essay. Results indicate students performed better on the first dyadic essay than on the subsequent individual essay, but showed no gain in the second dyadic essay over the other individual assignment examined. The taped dyads showed very different dynamics of cooperation. Responses to the first dyadic assignment were overwhelmingly positive. Comments on the second dyadic assignment were more general and included more negative reactions. The technique is seen as useful for both teaching and research. (MSE)

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# TEACHING THE WRITING PROCESS THROUGH FULL DYADIC WRITING

In this paper we discuss our experience in teaching the writing process to ESL students through using full dyadic writing (FDW). By FDW we mean a process in which two people fully collaborate in writing a manuscript from the very beginning (i.e. deciding on a goal and generating ideas) to the end (i.e. generating a "publishable" written manuscript). We have found that FDW may be used to raise the consciousness of the students about the writing process.

For a long time, experts in pedagogy have found that some kinds of learning goals can be best achieved through collaboration. According to Nystrand (1986, p. 180), the use of peer review groups in writing dates back to at least Moffett's 1968 book, Teaching the Universe of Discourse. In reviewing other researchers' works, Nystrand (1986, p. 180) reports that peer review has been found to enhance critical thinking, organization, appropriateness, revision, writer confidence, and attention to prewriting and awareness of one's own writing processes. Nystrand himself found that college students who work intensively in peer review groups learn to view revision as

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This paper was presented at the 1992 TESOL Convention in Vancouver, Canada, in March 1992.

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reconceptualization whereas those who do not tend to view revision as editing. Gere and Stevens found that peer review groups provide feedback that is mostly informative in content and is more specific than that of the teachers. Bruffee (1984), an eloquent advocate of collaborative learning, argues persuasively that collaboration in teaching writing is not only a useful technique, but also it is essential to writing as it provides an audience and the social context for communication.

Most of the studies on collaborative writing are concerned with groups that function mainly to provide the students with opportunities help one another to revise and edit. However, there are a number of studies that involve groups in the entire writing process. One such study was done by Freedman (1987). In a study of two ninth grade writing classrooms, she found groups are useful in four different ways: 1) for responding to writing 2) thinking collaboratively 3) writing collaboratively and 4) and editing. In this study, Freedman found that groups that function most collaboratively are not those attending to the writing of an individual, but, rather, those that work together on a single text. She concludes that groups function collaboratively only if the members work together on a group-centered product. Although this study was done with groups larger than two, it is similar to our study in the sense that the students worked on a single text from the beginning to the end.

A study by O'Donnell et al (1985) is one of few significant studies of collaborative writing that involve the use of dyads in the composing stage. O'Donnell et al randomly divided 36 students into two groups: Group 1 students were asked to work in dyads; while Group 2 students were asked to write individually. They were given 50 minutes to write a set of instructions on how to start a car. On the following day, the students in both groups were asked to write individually a set of instructions on how to operate a tape recorder in 50 minutes. The researchers found that the students in Group 1 produced writing that was more communicative than the writing of the students in Group 2. This was true of both writing tasks; the benefits of dyadic writing had transferred to individual writing. The researchers observe that they found no difference in completeness between the two groups in either writing task.

In an earlier pilot study where we used full collaboration throughout the entire writing processes, we found that students do not work well in groups larger than two. We observed that, in several groups of four, the students in each group divided themselves into two groups of two after twenty minutes and divided the contents (e.g. "We will write the introduction and the first reason, and you write the second reason and the conclusion.") Then they came together at end to put their texts together. As for those that worked in groups of three, we found that two took a major role in the writing process while the third

person was passive and did not get involved. It was obvious that the students found it difficult to collaborate and negotiate in groups of three or four. (However, we have found that when students write individually, groups of three work well for brainstorming and peer feedback.) Therefore, we decided to group the students in dyads for the present study.

From our own experience in writing and from what we hear about the writing practices of writers writing in professional contexts, we believe collaborative writing is common practice. Indeed, we wrote most of this paper collaboratively. We feel the use of full collaborative writing in ESL pedagogy deserves attention.

**Our Research Goals**

1. To find out if students write better in dyads than when they do individually

2. To find out what processes and procedures the students use as they write collaboratively

3. To see whether dyadic writing facilitates the teaching of the writing process approach

4. To examine the writing processes of dyads from narrowing the topic and brainstorming to "publishing".

## DESIGN

o The students: There were 31 students, ages 18-22, from two ESL sections of freshman English, taught by the same instructor. They were from diverse cultural backgrounds; however, the majority were from Asia and about 40 percent of all students were Japanese. Almost 80 percent of the dyads had a Japanese member.

o Dyadic grouping: We got the students to collaborate on the writing task in groups of two through the entire writing process

o Grouping considerations: The students were told they were free to choose a partner as long as they did not have the same L1. (We did this to allow the students to benefit from different writing traditions. However, if FDW is used to gain awareness into the writing traditions of different cultural groups, one might consider pairing students from the same cultural background.)

o Single product requirement: Dyads were told they had to work on and produce one essay throughout. This is in agreement with Freedman (1987), who found groups collaborate best when students in a group concentrate on a single essay.

o Number of tasks. The students wrote a total of seven essays during the semester. Of these, the first and the fifth were done collaboratively in dyads. The other five were done individually although they were reviewed by peers before they were submitted to the instructor.

o Topics for FDW. The topics for the FDW assignments were:

FWD 1: Should people be allowed to sell their body organs for transplant purposes?

This was done after the students had read and discussed an article about the sale of body organs in India. Their task was specific; they were told to take a position in regards to the topic and defend it.

FDW 2: The problem of poverty and what should be done.

This was done after the students had read several articles about poverty in the United States and around the world, had seen a video about poverty in the U.S., and had discussed the contents of the readings and the video. Here the topic was general; therefore, part of their task was also narrowing the topic.

o Timing of dyadic writing: The first dyadic writing was assigned in the second week of the semester after the students had written some summaries and reaction essays in class; however, this was the first formal essay they were writing for the course. The second essay was assigned in the tenth week. This was their fifth essay for the course.

o Data collection: In the fist FDW, three pairs volunteered to have their entire writing process videotaped by the researchers. The students met twice for each assignment outside class (at the library). They had been told they could meet as many times and take as much time as they needed. For the purpose of this study, the students had been given no instructions about how they should proceed with the FDW apart from being told that they were to fully cooperate in producing an essay together.

o Quantitative data processing. The students in each dyad were given a score by the instructor as he would normally evaluate all essays. The scores in the first FDW were compared to the second essay in the course (written individually) and the scores on the second FDW (essay 5 for the course) were compared to Essay 4. The instructor evaluated the essays on a scale of 1-10 using his evaluation sheet as it appears in Appendix A. The instructor used the evaluation sheet as an absolute criterion. The students' performance on each FDW assignment was compared to an

adjacent individual writing assignment to see if there was a difference between FDW and individual writing.

o Qualitative data analysis 1. The researchers viewed the video recordings of the writing sessions twice and wrote down observations and discussed them. This provided insights into the composing behaviors of the dyads during FDW.

o Qualitative data analysis 2. The students were asked to write down their reactions to collaborative writing after each FDW. These provided some insight about how the students felt about FDW.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Quantitative results

As Table 1 indicates, the students did better on the first FDW assignment than they did in the subsequent individual assignment. However, there was no gain in the second FDW over the previous individual writing assignment partly because they had by now learned a great deal about the writing process and partly because the students did not follow instructions fully with the second FDW. (We will come to this problem later.) The instructor, who was fully familiar with the students' writing, reported that,

when the students collaborate, they do especially well in developing and creating a clear, unified focus. This is to be expected as the students tend to brainstorm and negotiate more when they collaborate.

**Table 1**: Comparing essays written collaboratively and individually

| | FDW 1 | ASSIGNMENT 2 | FDW 2 | ASSIGNMENT 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SECTION 1: | | | | |
| | 8.77 | 8.27 | 8.43 | 8.17 |
| | 11 | 11 | 15 | 15 |
| SECTION 2: | | | | |
| | 8.14 | 8.07 | 8.62 | 8.88 |
| | 14 | 14 | 16 | 16 |
| Mean of both sections | 8.46 | 8.17 | 8.52 | 8.52 |
| | N=25 | N=25 | N=31 | N=31 |

**Qualitative results**

We report the qualitative results here in connection with the three dyads from FDW 1 that volunteered to have their writing process recorded.

Dyad 1. Dyad 1 consisted of Yuko, from Japan, and John, from Hong Kong. The students in this dyad could best be characterized as brainstormers; they spent most of their time discussing and sharing ideas and information.

This dyad was also idiosyncratic in that John had done a great deal of research on the topic and overwhelmed Yuko at the beginning with a great deal of information. Consequently, for most of the time, Yuko was asking questions and doing comprehension checks while John was providing information as a resource person. Toward the end, however, Yuko started sharing her own ideas and opinions as well.

When it came to writing, John did the inscribing while they composed together. Although they occasionally disagreed on certain points, they negotiated and reached agreement. The atmosphere was friendly and cooperative.

To summarize, the two students in this group were the strongest in the brainstorming phase of writing. They each brought their strengths to the task and learned from one another.

One advantage that this group showed for collaborative writing was generating many ideas which led to informed and informative writing.

Dyad 2. Dyad 2 consisted of Abdul, from Bangladesh, and Lin, from Hong Kong. Abdul can be best characterized as a non-collaborator. He missed his appointments twice and when he finally showed up, he was not prepared. He had not even read

the article that was the basis of class discussions on the topic. Consequently, he was confused during the meeting, and the dyad had to spend a lot of time in silence while Abdul read the basic article to familiarize himself with the issues. Subsequently, very little time was spent in discussing and writing collaboratively.

In the second session, Abdul came with lots of ideas already written down and imposed his ideas on Lin. As a result, very little negotiation took place. Throughout both meetings, the atmosphere was unfriendly and uncooperative.

Dyad 3: Dyad 3 consisted of Toshiko, from Japan, and Sue, from Hong Kong. This dyad could best be characterized as organizers; they spent most of their time on planning, organizing, and discussing strategies of written communication.

Toshiko and Sue were both well prepared. Although they had somewhat different opinions on the topic, they soon ironed out their differences and started working on common grounds. They did very little brainstorming and seemed to be greatly concerned with getting the task done right. They spent some time discussing whether the introduction and the conclusion should be the same or different. When it came to writing, Sue suggested that one person should write the introduction and conclusion and the other person write the body. Toshiko felt that it was not a

good idea to separate the introduction and the conclusion from the body but went along with Sue's suggestion. Once the preliminary writing had been done, they came together to combine and revise their writing. As it turned out, each one suggested many changes in the other's part, and one can say that, in this way, they integrated their writing.

Sue was very conscious of how the audience may react to their writing and made frequent suggestions to make the writing more reader-based. The changes had to do with word choice, use of logical connectors, adding and deleting text parts, and moving text around.

In general, Toshiko and Sue focused greatly on what to revise and how to revise to make their text clearer to the reader. Even though they disagreed on many occasions, they were not defensive and the atmosphere remained non-threatening and cooperative throughout. They seemed to value each other's opinions a great deal.

Reactions to FDW's

After each dyadic writing activity we asked the students to write a reaction essay individually concerning their experience in dyadic writing.

REACTION TO FIRST FDW

The reactions were overwhelmingly positive. The positive reactions fall into two major categories. The great majority mention sharing, gathering, and generating ideas as the most beneficial aspect of the FDW. Some mentioned the opportunity to clarify the obscurity in writing and thinking about the readers. On the surface level, several mentioned receiving help from one another in dealing with grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Some mentioned gaining interpersonal skills, particularly learning to compromise.

There were only three negative comments. One said that it was time-consuming, another said it was hard to convince others, and yet another said the task was difficult.

REACTIONS TO SECOND FDW

The comments were more general and there were more negative remarks. Again generating and developing ideas were the most common responses. Several mentioned that they improved their own writing skills as they observed their partners' writing skills. There were positive remarks not directly related to writing; for example, one mentioned developing personal relationships and another mentioned having fun.

As for negative reactions, students complained that the activity was time-consuming and involved a lot of work. (This is understandable because students were very busy at this stage of the semester and we had required them to work outside the classroom).

Several students shared insights about the FDW. Two said FDW hinders individual writing processes while three said that this activity would be more beneficial at the beginning of the semester.

**Concluding remarks**

In general, we feel FDW is useful in raising the consciousness of the students about various aspects of the writing process including brainstorming, revising, and audience awareness. We also feel that in addition to being a valuable teaching technique, FDW may also be used as a research tool for gaining insight into the writing habits of the students; the students behave and communicate much more naturally when they collaborate than they do when they are asked to produce individual talk-aloud protocols.

The video recordings of FDW 1 show that, compared with regular pair work, the students in FDW are much more involved in brainstorming; the discussions are longer and more in depth, and

there is a greater degree of problem-solving and creative thinking. There was also a more mature writing behavior in the revision stage: ESL students normally deal mostly with surface level concerns at the revision stage, but now they were conversing about such things as whether their purpose was clear, whether their argument was persuasive, and whether their reader could follow what they were saying. The conversations during the writing indicate that the students engaged in FDW show concern for organization, supporting details and examples, audience needs, and the effectiveness of introductions and conclusions. In general, compared with the essays written individually, the compositions written in FDW 1 are much better developed, show better organization, and are better focused. Perhaps, one of the greatest advantages of FDW is peer tutoring; the Japanese students in our sample, who had not had much experience in expository writing, were able to learn from some students who were more experienced writers. (Almost each dyad had a Japanese student.)

It should be noted that the discovery aspect of writing is different in nature during FDW; whereas in individual writing the discovery takes place as a result of incubation and tapping subconscious personal resources, during FDW the discovery takes place mostly as a result of the mental stimulation in conversation.

**Suggestions**

In general we feel that FDW is a useful activity as it makes students aware of the different aspects of the writing process, especially brainstorming, revising, editing, and audience awareness.

Based on our experience, we can make the following suggestions for better a implementation of the FDW:

1. We still believe that it would be useful to do the FDW twice in the semester-- once in the beginning, and the other around the mid-semester. (We had done our second FDW toward the end of the semester.)

2. We should pair students who have similar opinions about argumentative topics.

3. FDW should be done in class so that it does not require an inordinate amount of time from students. This would also allow the instructors to make the students follow the procedures. If FDW is done outside class, we should devise some way of checking if the students have engaged in collaboration. This may be done through asking the students to submit drafts and to write individual journals about their experience in FDW.

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APPENDIX A

EN 101-ESL Dr. Ali Aghbar

EVALUATION SHEET FOR THE ESSAY

TOPIC:

Writer's name:_____

Your essay must have the following standard features:

___Multiple drafts

___Evidence of giving and receiving feedback (Include all drafts.)

___Word-processing and a legible, double-spaced printout

___Visible multi-paragraph appearance and a clear title

___No more than 3 spelling errors

___Attention to grammatical features we have covered

Your essay was evaluated for the following writing features:

| WRITING FEATURES | FEEDBACK | COMMENTS | EVALUATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| Performance on above features | | | |
| Extent of revision | | | |
| Clarity of communication | | | |
| Dev. of revised version | | | |
| Trans. within & among ¶'s | | | |
| Focus and organization | | | |
| Logical force | | | |
| Appropriate use of language | | | |

Additional comments:

/ =Satisfactory (All / marks result in a base grade of 8)
/+ =More than satisfactory (Adds 1/2 point to base grade)
/- =Less than satisfactory (Deducts 1/2 point from base grade)
X =Not satisfactory (Deducts 1 point from the base grade)

Final evaluation: /10

☐ A check mark to the left of this paragraph means that you must take your writing to a Writing Center Tutor and receive feedback from her/him before you work on and turn in your final draft.